

Being A Member In Discernment at the 31st UCC General Synod
Journal Entries from Naleen Andrade

Friday, June 30, 2017:

It's my first General Synod. Baltimore is the host city. It's summer—hot, really hot—and bustling with cars, trams, and drivers who seem oblivious of all of us navigating their streets to their Convention Center. There are about 2,700 attendees that have come from throughout North America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania. I'm one of over a hundred MIDs, which stands for "Members In Discernment" and refers to a person enrolled in seminary to become an ordained UCC minister. There are two of us first-time-MIDs from the Hawai'i Conference, Pualani Akaka and I, who are on Brown Endowment Scholarships that pay for our expenses. We are thrilled and thoroughly appreciative of the gift we have been given that introduces us to the workings of our national body.

My first event was the MID Breakfast Meeting that occurred yesterday morning where I met over 200 other MIDs who are enrolled in seminaries throughout the U.S. As we shared our background experiences, I was struck by our diversity and commonality: we were each unique, yet united by our love of Christ as the Head of the United Church. At the table I sat at we had a award winning musician and Associate Conference minister, retired corporate accountant now doing international charitable work, a licensed minister from the Northeast working her way through seminary, a school teacher, and a physician and professor. A highlight of the gathering was having General Minister and UCC President Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer welcome us. He told us to expect the unexpected and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us as we answer the call of God and the Church because it is the only way we will find joy and meaning as servant leaders for Christ.

The middle of the day was filled with observing committees discuss resolutions they would bring to the plenary session for voting. These meetings showed how people of God struggled to sustain a civility while expressing their intense beliefs and feelings about the resolutions on the table. And, then

the best was last with the opening worship service and plenary in which over 2,000 were in attendance. Rev. Traci Blackmon gave an awe inspiring sermon that challenged us to risk for God.

Can you imagine a baptism of over 2,000 souls? After Rev Blackmon's sermon they ministers blessed the waters and sponges and the assembly used them to on the neighbors among us to reaffirm our relationship with Christ and each other. Amen!

Saturday, July 1, 2017:

This morning the day started with attending the Western Region Conferences meeting. At 6:10am, only Lori Yamashiro, our HCUCS administrative coordinator were in the meeting room, which was not yet set up to host a breakfast for a large group. But, in her unstated and masterful way, Lori got a hold of the staff and assisted the set-up while assuring the Hawaii conference delegates had adequate seating. Within minutes the rest of delegates poured and helped the staff put the tablecloths on the tables: and breakfast and the hour-long meeting began. It was fascinating to listen to the different delegates report out the work of the committees they sat on and hear two sets of speakers share their input on key resolutions involved with fund development and protecting the children in Middle East nations. Then introductions of the youth delegates, MIDs, and Conference and Associate ministers.

Following this meeting we heading to the second plenary. Lori sat with me, just outside the "bar" that separates the visitors and the delegates. Lori knows everyone and everything there is to know about the UCC and HCUCS. She is a godsend for her uncanny ability to help each of us in the Hawaiian delegation to navigate the unfamiliar and make us feel welcome in a place that neither we nor she knows well. She answered all my questions about the today's plenary session formats with enormous patience and joy while maintaining a childlike and infectious sense of humor.

The plenary music and speakers filled me with the Holy Spirit. The first speaker spoke in a cadence and musicality of words that reminded me of the Rev Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His message was simple and profound, "We as church need to catch up to God's plan and calling!" The second

speaker challenged the UCC, its 38 conferences, and hundreds of local churches to bring to life the words of Micah, "...To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God!" A chicken skin moment occurred when ten Native American youth from the Standing Rock Water Protectors received the first Justice Witness Ministries award for their work to protect the creation of the native lands.

The third speaker was Glennan Doyle, a writer and member of a UCC local church, who had a conversation on the Synod stage with Moderator the Rev. Sue Artt. She conveyed enormous wisdom in the vernacular of real life. When asked about how the UCC could be a more effective voice in today's sociopolitical world that appears to bring more division and hate, she replied, "The racism and hate was always there..." what has changed is that these expressions of bigotry, sexism, racism and bigotry are so loud that we, progressives (like the UCC) cannot ignore it. "We must be louder... because in the absence of loud, loving leadership, people will follow a fool!"

I'm so grateful for having this priceless opportunity to learn about the UCC! To be able to share it with Pualani and the other members of the Hawaii Conference delegation is a joy. As I was leaving this afternoon's plenary, I realized as I looked around the room that the UCC is a Church is vast, and God is waiting for us to catch up to his vision, "United in Christ's love, a just world for all," and mission, "United in Spirit and inspired by God's grace, we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all."